

VZCZCXRO3902  
RR RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHDBU #2210/01 3471257  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 131257Z DEC 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9229  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1880  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1943  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1905  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1934  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1861  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1389  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1140  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0744

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 002210

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: DUSHANBE'S MAYOR STRIKES AGAIN, AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TRY TO GRAB PRIVATE PROPERTY

CLASSIFIED BY: TJACOBSON, AMBASSADOR, STATE, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Dushanbe's Mayor Ubaidulloyev, known for his autonomy in governing Tajikistan's capital, has his eye on a building owned by the Grace Sun Min Church and wants to turn the building into a school. However, his motives appear suspect, in light of his past attempts to take the church to court in an attempt to privatize the building and then sell it. This case illustrates a broader pattern of abuse of power with government officials seizing land from private citizens without compensation. Although some corrupt government officials select their targets indiscriminately, several examples of land and property disputes have targeted religious organizations. END SUMMARY.

#### THE MAYOR VS. THE CHURCH-ROUND TWO

[¶2.](#) (C) In an attempted property grab, Dushanbe's Mayor Ubaidulloyev plans to seize the Grace Sun Min Church's building. Grace Sun Min is a Christian church run by American citizen Yun Seop Choi. Vladimir Kim, a church member, claims he has copies of documents with handwritten notes from Ubaidulloyev instructing the Tajik Supreme Economic Court and the General Prosecutor's Office to find any way to get the Grace Sun Min's building back in the city's control. At this point, no legal case has been filed. However, Kim feels it is only a matter of time before Ubaidulloyev moves his plans forward.

[¶3.](#) (C) Ubaidulloyev's desire to take the Grace Sun Min Church's building dates back to 2001. The building in dispute was legally purchased by the church in 1996 from the city council. The city tried to take the building back, forcing a court trial. Kim believes that in 2001, Ubaidulloyev had intended to seize the building and then grant it to a relative or friend who would privatize it and sell it for profit. During the trial, which Embassy officers observed, the Grace Sun Min Church proved its legal ownership and retained the building. Under Tajik law, the statute of limitations to appeal the case has passed.

[¶4.](#) (SBU) In February of this year, Ubaidulloyev himself visited the church and surveyed the building, a highly out-of-character move for the aloof Mayor. He said he would

like to turn the building into a school, reasoning that schools are overcrowded in Dushanbe and thousands of children need space for education. (NOTE: This is indeed true, Dushanbe's schools are overcrowded and children have to go to school in shifts to accommodate everyone. END NOTE.) No restitution was offered to the church at the time. Shortly after the mayor's visit, officials from the General Prosecutor's Office arrived, pointed out that the church did not obtain the proper permits to renovate the building's roof, and demanded a fine.

15. (C) Fearing another trial and harassment from the mayor's office, the church is considering renovating the building into a private school. Kim said that the church has been advised that by doing this, it can maintain ownership and control of the building and take away the mayor's current pretext for seizing the building.

NOT THE FIRST TIME, SEVERAL PAST EXAMPLES

16. (U) The Grace Sun Min Church is not the only religious organization in town entangled in property disputes. The highest profile example, Dushanbe's only synagogue, has been partially torn down and may eventually be completely destroyed to accommodate the government's plans for a green zone around the new presidential palace. Other businesses, private homes, two mosques and a psychiatric hospital in the area have already been razed. Ubaidulloyev has a history of property and permit disputes, most notably when he forced the popular restaurant La Grande Dame to tear down its facade, claiming the owner did not have the proper authorization to renovate. The mayor's office has also demanded the British Embassy raze its outer wall to increase the setback from the street by several feet.

17. (C) Operation Mercy, formerly known as CADA, also faced

DUSHANBE 00002210 002 OF 002

property issues when the former Minister of Industry wanted to build on private property adjacent to the Christian NGO's office. The two sides were able to reach a mutual agreement. More than one year ago, the organization faced a more hostile confrontation when a relative of former Prime Minister Hayoev, a co-owner of the HIMA cotton futures company, wanted to buy a house owned by CADA. The buyer was prepared to pay over market value for the house; however, due to a lack of proper documentation on the buyer's part, CADA was not willing to sell it. The buyer then threatened to have city officials devalue CADA's house well below market value if it refused to sell. Fortunately, CADA was able to use its government connections to resolve the issue and never did sell to Hayoev's relative.

18. (SBU) Dushanbe's Baptist Church in the past year had a children's camp in Varzob District outside of Dushanbe confiscated by the government. The government's rationale was that the camp was located too close to the presidential dacha. The Baptist Church's pastor believes that a government official has his eye on the camp and the property will eventually be privatized for the benefit of the official. The land seizures in Varzob District also affect several residents who have lived in the area for over forty years. Residents are distraught over the forced relocation. The families were turned out when the General Prosecutor's Office decided it wanted to build a dacha in the area. Although the community has repeatedly appealed to the government, it has not received a response.

19. (C) COMMENT: Even if the government is not deliberately targeting religious institutions to seize property, it blatantly disregards private property rights. Authorities usually fail to provide proper compensation for displaced owners and do not actively engage in discussions with them. Officials feel free to take whichever property they desire; the result makes normally complacent Tajik citizens extremely angry at the government's corruption and abuse of power. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON